

# Exhibit 68

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## **Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority needs to hire its own police force**

By Rod Watson  
Dec 17, 2014

If city officials are looking for ways to improve police-community relations, they could start in public housing, where tenant leaders say the \$650,000 pact for city police services yields little except harassment by cops racking up court time.

Public housing officials counter that they're trying to combat drugs and gangs and, within a limited budget, provide a safe environment.

Those contrasting views mirror the larger debate over policing outlined at a community forum Tuesday night. But officials need not wait for citywide reforms before reinstating a Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority police force to take a bite out of the problem.

Tenant leaders say they and visitors are routinely stopped by Buffalo police for no good reason, and they're fed up with the 21-member city police housing unit the BMHA first contracted for in 2010, after disbanding its own police force to save money.

"We do not want the contract to go forward because it's a waste of taxpayer dollars," said Sam Smith, chairman of the tenants' Jurisdiction-Wide Resident Council.

Instead, they want that money used to solicit bids for a security force that would spend more time on site, distinguish good tenants from thugs and respond more quickly to calls.

In a round-table discussion, tenant leaders from five BMHA developments described what amounts to stop-and-frisk harassment of themselves, relatives and visitors. On the other hand, they complain, it often takes police 40 to 45 minutes to respond – which officials dispute. When cops do show up, they often ignore residents' rights and barge into apartments on the grounds that they don't need reasonable suspicion because it's "public" property – something a Legal Aid Society lawyer called patently untrue.

BMHA Board Chairman Michael Seaman said the authority needs to do a better job of telling residents what the city police housing unit has accomplished and the arrests it has made.

But that "success" is part of the problem. Legal Aid lawyer Rebecca Town said there were 315 trespass arrests from 2010 through this fall, but that recently "they're mostly all getting dismissed" by judges.

Admittedly, there is what BMHA Executive Director Dawn Sanders-Garrett calls a "delicate balance" between respecting tenants and dealing with crime, including drug dealing and thugs taking over apartments. Seaman said the BMHA is now reaching out to tenant councils for guidance on how police can better strike that balance.

The most obvious way is by reviving a housing authority police force whose members would be in the developments, building relationships and who would be more directly accountable to tenants.

Seaman appears open to that. But while not putting a dollar sign on safety, he notes a roughly \$100,000 price tag per officer. The authority disbanded its police force to save \$2 million, which raises the question of how much security it could buy for \$650,000 – even minus costly city fringe benefits.

But why not bid it and find out?

City police still would chase down drug dealers. But they'd have fewer encounters with tenants and benefit from the tips BMHA cops develop by working closely with residents.

It might even be a template for how community policing and anti-crime task forces should – but don't always – work in the rest of the city.

email: **rwatson@buffnews.com**

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